



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 15, 2011

TO: Honorable Council President Young and Members of the City Council

FROM: Stacey LoMedico, Park and Recreation Director

SUBJECT: Experimental Closures of Cabrillo Bridge and Plaza de Panama

On June 8, 2011, the Rules Committee requested the Park and Recreation Director report back to the City Council on the potential for temporary closures of the Cabrillo Bridge and Plaza de Panama to motor vehicles on "an experimental basis."

BACKGROUND

The Park and Recreation Department has no record of comparable experiments being conducted with the Cabrillo Bridge and Plaza de Panama, and would recommend proceeding carefully before undertaking any plan that may have unintended adverse impacts on park institutions and visitors.

Over the past two decades, the Cabrillo Bridge has been closed to vehicles for several hours at a time, primarily to accommodate special events hosted in the park such as marathons. These closures are typically for a few hours at any one time. In addition, records indicate it was closed for a five week period in 1989 for a construction project. However, these closures affected the bridge only; the Plaza de Panama was not closed to traffic, parking or visitor drop-offs. The point of the request from the Rules Committee was to use the bridge closure to facilitate the removal of traffic and parking from Plaza de Panama.

In May 1989 a partial closure was undertaken when one lane of the Cabrillo Bridge was closed to traffic for one day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Vehicles were prevented from using the bridge to leave the park westbound, but still used the Cabrillo Bridge to enter the park eastbound. During this experiment, vehicles were able to drive on the West El Prado and Plaza de Panama. In addition, a number of disabled accessible parking spaces within the Plaza de Panama remained open. Attached is the report which describes this experiment in greater detail.

Full park closures, such as those that occur during December Nights, are intended to accommodate special events that attract large crowds. They necessitate off-site parking arrangements and shuttle buses.

The closure of the Cabrillo Bridge, as discussed during the Rules Committee meeting, would block access to traffic in both directions so as to facilitate the closure of the Plaza de Panama to traffic and parking. Park circulation dictates that the closure of Plaza de Panama would also necessarily require the closure of the Alcazar parking lot to traffic and parking. These changes would result in a net loss of about 175 parking spaces, including 26 accessible parking spaces. Vehicles entering Balboa Park on Presidents Way could travel no farther than the Spreckels Organ Pavilion parking lot, where additional disabled accessible parking spaces would be created to make-up for those lost during the experiment.

Previous experiences with Cabrillo Bridge closures may not be indicative of current conditions. Records show that the traffic counts in 2004 indicate a weekday count of 4,850 Average Daily Trips (ADT) at El Prado (Cabrillo Bridge). The recent 2011 counts conducted by the Plaza de Panama Committee at the same location show a weekday ADT of 5,700, and weekend counts in excess of 7,000 vehicles. During bridge closures, those visitors will either park on the west side and cross the Cabrillo Bridge on foot or circle the park to access the lots along Park Boulevard.

As with any experiment, bridge closures must be designed to collect objective data that is useful in determining the impact these closures have on parking and circulation, on access to cultural institutions, and on the visitor's overall park experience.

In preparation for the City Council hearing on July 19, 2011, I reached out to Balboa Park institutions and informed them that I was considering potential summer dates and strategies for these experimental closures, including closures on weekends and holidays, and for extended periods of time during days and evenings.

I specifically sought their input on three issues:

- a) *What are the potential effects that closure of the Cabrillo Bridge may have on the ability of the public to participate in your programs and activities?*
- b) *If your organization or institution is directly impacted by curtailment of vehicle access, what steps will be taken to ensure that the elderly and disabled have access to your programs or activities?*
- c) *What metrics should be utilized to determine the impact that bridge closures have on the Balboa Park experience?*

From the responses received, a summary of which is attached, as well as input from Cal Trans and Park and Recreation Department staff, it is advisable that any bridge closure experiment must be preceded by the following steps:

- Engaging the City's Traffic Division on recommendations for the execution of bridge closures and the evaluation of their impacts on traffic flow in and around Balboa Park, specifically with regard to Park Boulevard.
- Developing, in coordination with Cal Trans and City Traffic Division staff, a detailed traffic detour plan that includes plans for signage and routes for private and emergency vehicles, including contingency plans.
- Working with the private trolley company that operates in Balboa Park to develop a temporary circulation plan, potentially to include an increase in trolley frequency and an expansion of its service area.
- Conducting a comprehensive public information campaign, well in advance of each bridge closure, directed at park employees and visitors, and people who live and work near the park.
- Working with Balboa Park institutions to implement a strategy for measuring the impact of bridge closure on foot traffic, attendance and ticket sales at various park venues.
- Identifying a funding source for costs associated with the above.

If the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Plaza de Panama, Circulation, and Parking Structure Project is authorized and completed, it will provide valuable analysis of traffic circulation in and around Balboa Park that will provide a point of comparison for any analysis conducted by the City.

Technical studies contained in the EIR will analyze traffic flow and usage patterns within each of the parking lots and Balboa Park as well as for the following intersections and roadways:

INTERSECTIONS

Park Boulevard/Robinson Avenue
Park Boulevard/Upas Street
Park Boulevard/Morley Field Drive
Park Boulevard/Zoo Place
Park Boulevard/Village Place
Park Boulevard/Space Theater Way
Park Boulevard/Inspiration Way
Park Boulevard/Presidents Way
Park Boulevard/SR 163 NB Ramps
Park Boulevard/I-5 SB Ramps
Park Boulevard/A Street
Richmond Street/Robinson Avenue
Richmond Street/Upas Street
6th Avenue/Robinson Avenue

Honorable Council President Young and Members of the City Council
July 15, 2011

6th Avenue/Upas Street-Balboa Drive
6th Avenue/Quince Street
6th Avenue/Laurel Street
6th Avenue/Elm St -I-5 NB off ramp
6th Avenue/Ash Street
6th Avenue/A Street
Balboa Drive/Quince Drive
Balboa Drive/El Prado
El Prado/Plaza de Panama
Pan American Road/Organ Pavilion Lot
Pan American Road/Presidents Way
Presidents Way/Organ Pavilion Lot
Presidents Way/Federal-Aerospace Lot

ROADWAYS

Park Boulevard
6th Avenue
Balboa Drive
Richmond Street
Robinson Avenue
Upas Street
El Prado
Plaza de Panama
Pan American Road
Presidents Way
Space Theater Way
Village Place
Zoo Place
A Street

- Attachments: 1. Excerpts from Balboa Park Institution Comments Regarding Closure of the
Cabrillo Bridge
2. Manager's Report 89 – 205, Balboa Park Traffic Experiment (April 26, 1989)

cc: Honorable Mayor Jerry Sanders
Jay M. Goldstone, Chief Operating Officer
Julie Dubick, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Gerry Braun, Director of Special Projects, Mayor's Office
Tony Heinrichs, Public Works Director
Kip Sturdevan, Interim Director Transportation and Storm Water
Scott Reese, Park and Recreation Assistant Director
Kathleen Hasenauer, Deputy Director, Developed Regional Parks Division
Debbie Van Wanseele, Deputy Director, Transportation and Storm Water
Charlie Daniels, Park Designer, Administrative Services Division
Bruce Martinez, District Manager, Developed Regional Parks Division
Balboa Park Committee Members

**Excerpts from Balboa Park Institution Comments
Regarding Closure of the Cabrillo Bridge**

A. What are the potential effects that closure of the Cabrillo Bridge may have on the ability of the public to participate in your programs and activities?

- “Park Boulevard is currently at or near capacity on many weekends during the summer. Closing the Cabrillo Bridge would, by necessity, direct all traffic to Park Boulevard and, especially during the summer season, would be disastrous. We believe that would result in major bottleneck at every major intersection, Highway 163 and the I-5 freeway. Remember that 40% of Balboa Park traffic arrives from the west over the Cabrillo Bridge. ... If this disastrous experiment is conducted, we believe the media will cover the resulting gridlock and many will not even attempt to visit the Park. Those that do will find it very difficult to navigate the only remaining entrance – Park Boulevard. In addition, we believe many will park in Bankers Hill and other areas west of the Park resulting in congestion for those neighborhoods.”
- “Simply closing the bridge and having all entry to the park from the eastern side (Presidents Way) would be a detriment to people’s convenience and enjoyment of the park, and to attendance at [our programs]. While it appears that much of the audience for [our programs] is parking on the east side of the Cabrillo Bridge, it is still possible that closing the Cabrillo Bridge [around the time of our events] during the summer would produce a traffic jam at the Presidents Way entrance that would deter park visits. The resulting media attention could also cause the local public to stay away.”
- “Closure of the Cabrillo Bridge will have a disastrous impact on [our institution]. Specifically, [our institution] relies heavily on admissions revenues to support its operating budget. Closing the Cabrillo Bridge – even for a few days on an experimental basis – would completely isolate [our institution] on the West side without any nearby parking whatsoever, and have a significant impact on admissions-related revenues. This will not only negatively impact our ticket sales, but also our [gift shop] sales, which also constitute a significant percentage of [our] operating budget. This, in turn, will significantly hamper our ability to serve the public with quality exhibits and programs.”
- “The precise effect of the closure is unclear. ... Closing the bridge temporarily, without adequate directional signage, will lead to massive frustration on the part of park visitors, who will undoubtedly simply give up and not come to the park institutions. One needs to bear in mind that certain institutions... might bear catastrophic consequences without a very clearly thought-out plan, and perhaps even with one.”

- “[Members of the public] will simply not find us, nor will they look any further. Even for the more experienced San Diegan the re-route to Park/Presidents Way or potential failure to find adequate, close parking will be a daunting challenge they’ll not undertake. The Balboa Park guest experience, in fact the San Diego guest experience during our highest visitor timeframe (tourists), will be significantly and quantifiably diminished. ... Any closure, just for testing or for any reason, will simply have an irreversible and unintended consequence for everyone. It is ill-conceived and will financially devastate many in the Park who, especially during this continued challenging economy, depend so much on appropriate and easy access to the Park from the west.”
- “The impact of a temporary closing of the Cabrillo Bridge as ‘an experimental basis’ would permanently damage our reputation and have a material adverse effect on our operations.”

B. If your organization or institution is directly impacted by curtailment of vehicle access, what steps will be taken to ensure that the elderly and disabled have access to your programs or activities?

- “During these closures motor vehicles would be prohibited on the Cabrillo Bridge [but also on] West El Prado and Plaza de Panama, and in addition [these closures would] close the Alcazar Gardens parking lot. ... The closure of Plaza de Panama eliminates both vehicle access to [our institution] and a substantial number of handicap parking spots close to [our institution]. Closure of the Alcazar Gardens parking lot... eliminates all parking, including handicap parking, in that lot and prohibits any drop off at [our institution] and other institutions along the Plaza. That would impose a substantial burden on those with physical limitations trying to visit the Park, in particular [our institution]. This is not an effect that [our institution] is capable of mitigating. We have neither the resources nor the authority or power to provide for alternative handicap facilities and services.”
- “The closest handicap parking to us is the Alcazar Garden. Curtailing vehicle access will eliminate our handicap parking access.”
- “[Our institution] will continue to offer the same dedication to access for the older audiences and the disabled that we always have. However, [our institution] has no control over what happens before they reach our lease hold. The parking lots and accessibility within the park are completely the city’s responsibility. Should this experiment proceed, we will make it VERY CLEAR to our audiences who at the city they should direct their anger and frustration”
- [Our institution], if this proposal is implemented, has no means to take any steps to ensure that anyone can gain access to our facility whether they’re young, old, disabled or physically fit. Frankly, it seems to us that the responsibility to take steps resides with Balboa Park.

- “This ill-advised social experiment will create great stress for visitors to gain access to the parking lots within and adjacent to the Park. The parking lots in the Park are the City’s responsibility, as are the streets and roadways... We look forward to your answer to the question ... *What will the City do to make access to the institutions by the public available to all?*”

D. What metrics should be utilized to determine the impact that bridge closures have on the Balboa Park experience?

- “No suggestions. How do you measure those who choose not to come to the park: Bad feelings, frustration, choosing other recreational experiences? I don’t think this is readily measurable. Just measuring attendance and revenue changes are too simplistic and will not get the potential long term impact of this trial on visitors and the institutions in the Park.”
- “This is not really a valid experiment so there are no valid metrics to measure the impact. The most telling metric of the impact of this proposal will be revealed by those that are unable to use their Park and the resulting media coverage surrounding this poorly conceived proposal.”
- “I will not suggest metrics to be used as the basis for such a dangerous experiment to the future of the Park. But at the least an Environmental Impact Report should be required. Can this be done on such short notice?”



The City of San Diego

MANAGER'S REPORT

DATE ISSUED: April 26, 1989

REPORT NO. 89-205

ATTENTION: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

SUBJECT: Balboa Park Traffic Experiment

SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE COMMITTEE OR THE CITY COUNCIL.

BACKGROUND

On Tuesday, May 2, 1989, the Park and Recreation Department with the assistance of the Police Department will experiment with a controlled vehicle traffic pattern in the Prado area of Balboa Park. This experiment is one of several that the Department hopes to conduct over the next several months to help determine how the impacts of automobile traffic can be minimized so that the Prado area can be restored to a more pedestrian oriented environment. Recovery of the Prado area for pedestrian uses is one of the major goals of the Balboa Park Master Plan.

On May 2nd, between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M., traffic on Cabrillo Bridge will be restricted to one way eastbound through the central area of the park. Parking in the Plaza de Panama will be eliminated with the exception of 13+ spaces set aside for those vehicles displaying valid handicapped parking permits. Traffic westbound across the Cabrillo Bridge will not be permitted except for a free tram shuttle service and emergency vehicles. A tram service will operate from the old Naval Hospital parking lots at Park Boulevard and Presidents Way with shuttle service provided to the Palisades parking lot, the Organ Pavilion, Plaza de Panama, Museum of Man, 6th and Laurel and return to the Presidents Way/Park Boulevard site. Three shuttle buses will operate at 15 minute intervals throughout the day. Vehicle traffic will not be permitted into the Plaza de Panama area except for passenger drop off and pick up. The attached maps indicate the tram route and traffic flow pattern in the Plaza de Panama.

This experiment will close the Prado parking area in front of the Museum of Art and the Museum will conduct the following activities in order to best facilitate this experiment and promote public use of the Prado area between the hours of 10:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M.

An area with canopied tables that will seat approximately 100 which will serve such various fare as a continental style breakfast table, a cold refreshment table, etc.

A cafe area with seating for approximately 120. This area will be "carpeted" with grass matting and tables will be "umbrellaed." Beer and wine will be available at the tables for those of legal drinking age and consumption will be limited to a special roped off area.

A jazz concert area with free concerts open to the public between the hours of 11:30 and 3:30 P.M. with seating for approximately 200.

Temporary directional signs will be installed throughout the Prado area advising park patrons of parking areas, traffic patterns and tram service. On Friday, April 28, 1989, large information signs will be posted on the west end of Cabrillo Bridge advising motorists of the bridge one way traffic pattern on May 2nd. The Police Department has been involved in the discussions regarding this experiment and will provide traffic controllers and police traffic officers to assist and direct traffic.

The Central Balboa Park Association, the Balboa Park Committee and the House of Hospitality Association have been advised of the experiment.

Respectfully submitted,


COLEMAN CONRAD
Deputy City Manager

LOVELAND/JJK

Attachments

1. Tram Route Map
2. Plaza de Panama Traffic Pattern

- 1 ZOO ENTRANCE
- 2 PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS BUILDING
- 3 SPANISH VILLAGE
- 4 NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
- 5 CASA DEL PRADO
- 6 BOTANICAL BUILDING
- 7 SAN DIEGO MUSEUM OF ART
 - a West Gallery
- 8 TIMKEN ART GALLERY
- 9 OLD GLOBE THEATRE
- 10 MUSEUM OF MAN
- 11 EMPTY
- 12 HOUSE OF CHARM
 - a San Diego Art Institute

- 13 HOUSE OF HOSPITALITY
 - a Cafe del Rey Menu
- 14 CASA DE BALBOA
 - a Hall of Chompans
 - b Museum of Photographic Arts
 - c Morán Railroad Museum
 - d San Diego Historical Research Archives
 - e Balboa Art Conservation Center
- 15 SPACE THEATRE & SCIENCE CENTER
- 16 HALL OF NATIONS
- 17 UNITED NATIONS BUILDING
- 18 HOUSE OF PACIFIC RELATIONS

- 19 BALBOA PARK CLUB
 - a Park Development & Open Space
- 20 PALISADES BUILDING
 - a Puppet Theatre
 - b Recital Hall
 - c Balboa Park Management Center
- 21 CONFERENCE BUILDING
 - a Recreation Division
- 22 AREOSPACE HISTORICAL CENTER
 - a Areospace Museum & Hall of Fame
- 23 STARLIGHT BOWL
- 24 MUNICIPAL GYMNASIUM
- 25 FEDERAL BUILDING

NOTE: EL PRADO AREA - 11 to 15 PALISADES AREA - 16 to 25 *BUS STOPS **PUBLIC RESTROOMS

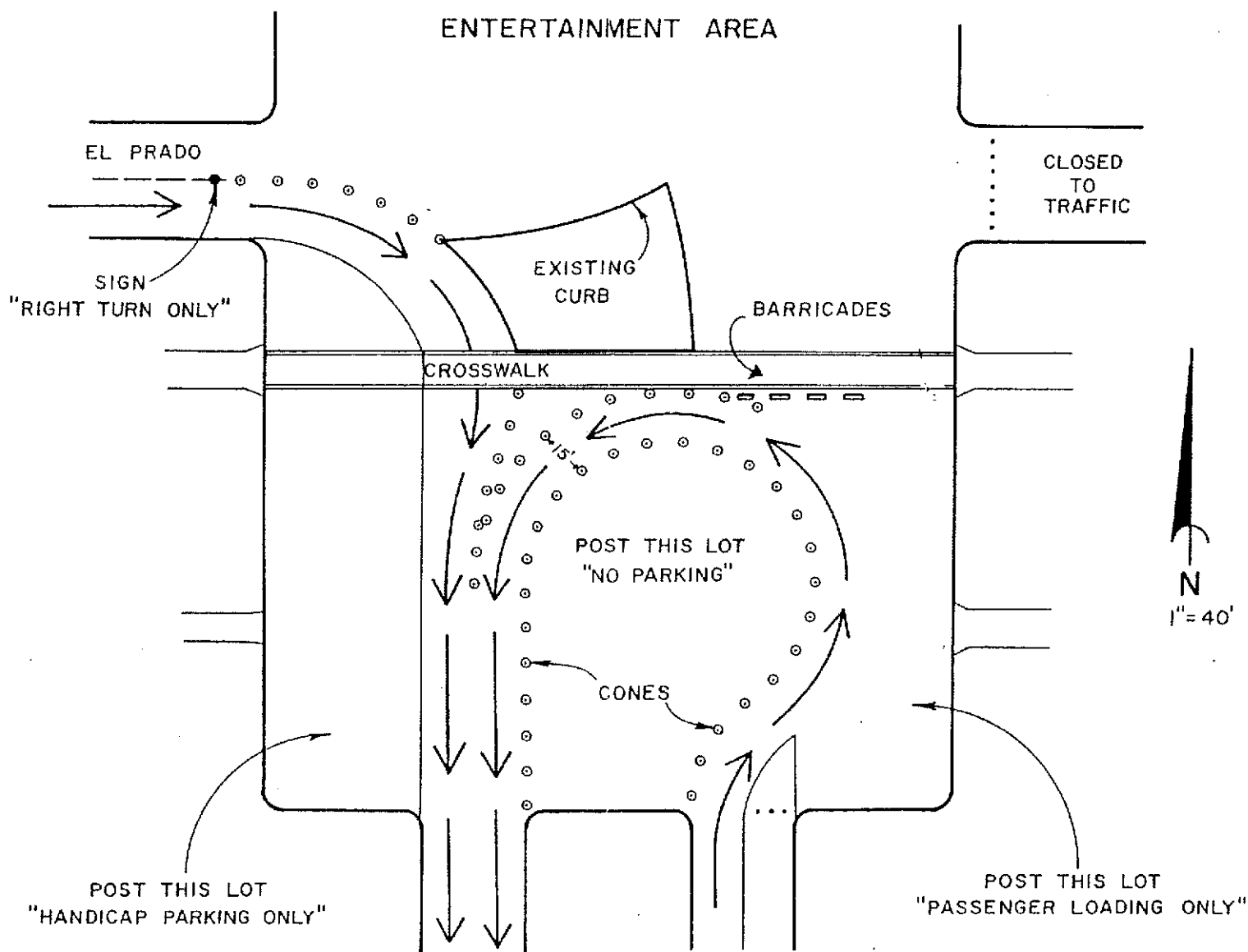
TYP. - TRAM STOP

TRAM
ROUTE

May 2, 1989

BALBOA PARK

Scale: 1" = 100'



PLAZA DE PANAMA TRAFFIC PATTERN

May 2, 1982